The Spirit of Charity

M. C. D'Arcy, S.J.

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By

M. C. D'Arcy, S.J.

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" I pray that the world grant you to know the charity of Christ, which surpasseth all knowledge."

Ephesians iii 19.

" All charity of those
Whose souls thy love doth warm;
All simple pleasures of such minds
As think no kind of harm;
All sweet delights wherewith
The patient hearts abound,
Do blaze thy name, and with thy praise
They make the world resound."

VENERABLE PHILIP HOWARD.

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INTRODUCTION

THIS little book is concerned with the greatest of themes; and it has hardly ever succeeded in shaking off a sense of shame and paltriness. Fortunately, it will not be able to rise up in the day of judgement to confront the author, and the recording Angel will have forgotten it. The greatest of Christian writers gave up in despair when he tried to describe the unsearchable riches of the charity of Christ. True he had already given tongue to what, after our Lord's own words at the Last Supper, is the most exalted description of divine love in any language, and one can take heart from the fact that those who threw down their pens before the ineffable have generally written what is long in extent as well as everlasting in worth. I think of the shelves filled with the works of Aquinas, and his final words to Reginald.

Fortunately, too, in a modest hundred pages even the most expectant will not look for an adequate treatment of Charity, so they cannot be disappointed. And if I make clear at the very beginning that what is to come is but a

kind of a note-book in which certain ideas and reflexions have been set down, then the reader will not be under any delusion. There is a thread of unity discoverable to those who will bother to read carefully. All writers, I suppose, have a background which makes what they say far more significant to themselves than to those who read, and simple statements which others pass over as banal are to them as heaven seen in a nutshell or as a bar of music suggestive of all the motifs of an opera. And here a dilemma presents itself, for one is tempted to emphasise the unity and so become metaphysical, and thus what is plain to the writer will be laid aside as frankly unintelligible by the reader; or one masses together detail, and then the unity being dim the reader is not coerced to look below the surface, and no impression is made upon him. The perfect craftsman, no doubt, would not be troubled by this dilemma, for the detail would be all relevant to the plan and be so expressed as to reveal and not obscure the unity. I must perforce choose a less perfect method and give an explanation beforehand as well as a clue to the labyrinths to come.

First, then, as to the connexion of the subject of Charity with Lent. Lent is associated with

" Lenten entertainment," with fasting and abstinence, and it is a period when the sorrowful aspect of the Christian religion is brought before our minds by the Church. But it would be a mistake to isolate this period from its close and from the majestic conception which governs the whole Christian economy. The keynote to the Catholic religion is " life," " and that more abundantly," and that life is in the diffusion in our hearts of charity by the Holy Ghost. We may well compare the time of Lent to the evening of the Last Supper. The moment was a sorrowful one, and had in it the presage of the Passion, as Lent moves to Good Friday and prepares for it. But in those very hours the love-feast of the Eucharist was celebrated, and the farewell words of our Lord are full of comfort and make up the most sublime ode to Charity which mortal ears have ever heard. He would not leave them orphans, he would come again and their sorrow would be turned into joy. They were to love one another, as most dear children; and their love was to be their distinguishing badge. They were to have a living memorial of him in his ever-continuing Presence and oblation, and in this new covenant of love and life, the Paraclete was to be the spirit and the principle of unity. Therefore

we should look upon Lent as a time of first Vespers before the morning when the dawn of charity will be seen in its most lovely colour, and the whole earth will rejoice in the warmth of its rays, and if this be not enough in explanation of what will be developed again later, let me add that the most perfect practice for Lent is that of charity to one's neighbour, material and spiritual.

To meet the need of combining the more human and practical with the abstruse, I have packed as much of the latter as possible into a first chapter which is not really difficult, but may look forbidding. Those, then, who are only vexed and dispirited by philosophy—and they are not thereby any further from the Kingdom of God—can skip the first chapter, and I can only pray that they may glean some fruit from what follows. And if they are left still unsatisfied, then I would beg them to take their New Testament and read in St John's Gospel the chapters from the thirteenth to the seventeenth and then turn to St John's Epistles. Everything is there, and he who runs may read.

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THE SPIRIT OF CHARITY

CHAPTER I

THE GROUND OF LOVE

" I will show thee all good."—*Exodus* xxxiii 19.

" God saw all the things that he had made, and they were very good."—*Genesis* i 31.

" Every best gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no change nor shadow of alteration."—*St James* i 17.

IF not content with the emotion of love or the desire thereof, we look for its foundation; then, as in all high undertakings, we must hark back to God and his creation. St Thomas Aquinas has a fortunate formula when he is pressed to account for God and his relations with his creatures, and it is that goodness is of its nature bountiful, " Bonum est diffusivum sui." There is a wealth of meaning in this formula, though it prove a check to the philosophers outside the Church and is in truth surrounded with mystery. All nature with all its works is good in a mitigated fashion and reflects in myriad separate guises

the perfect being of God. There is in everything that exists a meaning and a nature as well as the existence, and when the poet sings of the joy of just being alive, he is intoxicated with this twofold experience—he is something and he can enjoy the possession of it.

Here, then, let us rest for a moment. Of every creature save one is it true that its greatest glory is to be just what it is and to perfect its natural powers. There is nothing which is without value, though the value be graded and goodness can differ as star from star; while evil creeps in when the sharp outlines are blurred and the creature overreaches itself to desire an alien beauty.

To repeat then in more definite terms. To be, and to be perfection and goodness itself, are one and the same in God. In him is the plenitude—for to him there can be no addition; nor can he suffer any subtraction. He is the central fire of goodness, who diffuses his rays and makes according to his good pleasure finite participations of his inalienable infinity. All then that comes to be is good and desirable by a divine right, first because the spark which holds them over against nothingness is God's, and the individual and specific splendour which is theirs is also

a type memorial of the divine. Herein lies the secret and origin of love, for since all things are goodly and godly they are desirable and move towards one another in an appointed order. Each and all proclaim the glory of the Lord by their status of existence and resemblance to him, and form a social kingdom whereof the secret is law and union. The scientist and philosopher try to discover this origin of law and at the same time, though often they know it not, the "lovely-felicitous" workings of creative Wisdom.

Now, beneath the level of man, this giving and taking in nature which is unified in every scientific law is unconscious. The "Bless all ye works" which the children of the fiery furnace sang is no mere poetry of their imagination. The skies and seas and rain do rejoice in their work, but both they and the kingdom of living things stop at preserving their nature and species and sharing their goodness with each other. They praise by being what they are; they love by struggling to keep that being and spending themselves in the welfare of the whole universe. Since their being is from God, they thereby love and honour their author. "Sicut oculi servorum in manibus dominarum suarum." But all this is but a prologue to the

more perfect and recognisable form of love which is seen in creatures possessed of mind. The same law of union holds too for them, for they are good and therefore lovable and to be preserved, and they also share delights and live by giving. They too are fastened to their source, God, and give him homage. Yet there is a marvellous and mysterious difference. For with the advent of man there comes a new mode of being and a new power. No longer is the creature confined to his own dimensions and a definite boundary mark; no longer is the service, the giving and taking, blind. By the power of mind man can live consciously his own nature and reflect upon it and recognise his obligations and tendencies, and he can also live the life of others after a certain manner. Mind breaks down the wall of separation, and without leaving its author and suffering by contact can penetrate into the privacy of other things. Thereby a much deeper communion can be realised, and the ideal of love comes upon the scene.

Love works for union, not a union of identity where no difference persists, where all distinction is lost. At first sight it seems to crave for the impossible; it is never satisfied with duality. "It is not I but thou," said the Lover to the

Beloved. And yet such a consummation where the two passed completely into one would mean annihilation, the destruction of the very end of the desire. It is mind which solves the difficulty, for mind it is which takes possession and leaves the possessor the power to know himself in the possessed. He does not lose but find himself, for all that he acquires by mind is his as well as all that he wants. There are two pulses which beat the same rhythm. You are mine and I am yours, and in the silence of that perfect marriage there is no division. Mind multiplies and enriches, but it never plays traitor to its king by destroying him.

There are, of course, degrees of love, and love itself is usually looked upon as a tributary of mind or contrasted with it, and of this we must say something later. For the moment we must be content with some broad distinctions. Love is called an appetite or inclination and passion, and divides itself easily into two. There is the love of our lower nature, often called concupiscence or physical passion; while above this is the love of affection which is spiritual, an act of will proceeding on an appreciation of some good. This, if the affection be mutual, is called the love of friendship, though no English word quite does justice to it. In

general, we may say that love arises where some good is apprehended by the mind and the will is moved towards it. This movement is accompanied with different degrees of intensity, and is described in its ardour by the poets as a flame or sharp arrow or overwhelming surge.

It will be seen how this fits on to what was said about the goodness of all creation descending as it does from the Giver of all gifts. The intrinsic goodness of each creature makes it desirable, and as good is beneficent, each creature gives of its wherewithal. Now at the level of intellect this means that men see other things and other persons and their goodness draws them. Here love arises and reaches its end in that possession which is union "by intermingling without loss." But as each person is also good, he loves himself and in a way he is his own dearest possession. Here we touch on the problem of self, and the part it plays in love. Christianity has taken over and enlarged the Greek triple distinction between the love or friendship of utility and pleasure and that of disinterested affection. In the first two the self predominates—the friend is courted and loved because he is useful, or because he gives us delight. In the third self need not have disappeared, but it is subordinate—the friend is

loved for his own sake, for his goodness, to repeat the key-word, which is his. Another distinction which overlaps the one just given is that between the love of concupiscence and the love of benevolence. In the former it is our own gain which is most in sight; at its worst it is selfish, at its best, self-regarding, whereas benevolence is altruistic and forgets self in the contemplation of the beloved.

The all-important difference between these two kinds of love lies in the relative regard for the self. I will return to this again, as clear thought on the matter is of great help in the spiritual life. We find in books the constant refrain of self-denial, and we are called upon to make acts of charity or pure love. What these expressions mean is not always understood, and I must confess that theologians have divided opinions on their meaning. In this introduction we can do no better than fall back upon the principle of goodness already laid down. Every creature is good and therefore deserving of love, but creatures vary in virtue, and no single one, not even the sum total of them all, can be said to possess consummate goodness. Alone God has that. It follows, therefore, that each and every creature, in so far as it is capable of doing so, should try to preserve its own being and cherish

that being. This is the true foundation of self-love. But since each of us is dependent, we also can and should admire others for their own sake, and, be it noted, this love benefits the self. Both because the other is desirable for what he is and because it is the nature of good to diffuse itself, there should be mutual love and union; and so each order of being forms a society and like cleaves to like, and we can, if we wish, liken the amity within a species to an organism where the cells are independent members but at the same time members of a whole.

God alone transcends this law, though he gives in his very isolation the pattern of it. He is complete goodness, and therefore he has no like, save in the mysterious personal distinction and identity of nature of the Blessed Trinity. It would be good to dwell on this mystery, and show how it is, in its clouded heights, that it shows forth the culminating excellence of love. Independently, however, of this mystery and the other lights of revelation, we can catch something of the quality of love in God. The knowledge is best stated as a paradox. The proper object of God's love is himself, and just because of this he alone can love in a completely disinterested way. Thus there is in a sense no "give and take" for God in relation to his

creatures, and yet for all that he is the greatest giver and the perfect Lover. To appreciate this we have to underline once more the fact that God is goodness personified. In himself, therefore, he is all that is admirable and lovable, and there is no selfishness in this love, because he does not overlook any good in loving himself. In the inclination of his will, so to speak, to love whatever is perfect and beautiful, he finds only himself. But really there is no such inclination, there is only possession. The Beloved has all the virtues and the Lover is perfect, and so the Beloved and the Lover are one. They meet in the divine goodness, which is God. But now notice that as a result, if the Divine Goodness were to wish that other beings should share in his goodness, they would not compete with the Divine Goodness, their beauty would be but a far-off imitation, and the love of God for that creature would be utterly disinterested. Now good is bountiful, it is of its nature to give. But God cannot share his own nature save in the Trinity, for he is unique and incomparable and incommunicable. If then he gives, he will give freely, and the creature will benefit by existence and nature bestowed, and all that comes to it will flow from the generosity of God. That

is why God is the great Lover. He loves to give, and since he embraces perfect goodness in himself, he loves not for gain, but disinterestedly. The paradox then holds that God loves himself and yet his love for us and all creation is the most altruistic of all loves. In his plenitude he is able to consider our good, and our good without intrinsic profit to himself.

It was this thought which filled the mind of St Ignatius of Loyola with admiration of God's love, and we can watch the saint's development of it in his final contemplation in his *Exercises*. The Contemplatio ad Amorem bids us remember that love is shown by deeds, and that the lover gives of what he has, and, so far as it is possible, of what he is. We are then told to contemplate God as the giver in all that we have, as immanent in nature and in ourselves, and as the husbandman or worker, a true not mythical Demeter, whom the Greeks fondly imagined to be present at harvest time blessing invisibly the crops. And finally we are told to think of all beauty, all goodness as but a distillation of that inexhaustible source in God. Our answer must be in an offering of ourselves without reserve to that Love "which moves the sun and other stars." "Take, O Lord, and receive my memory, my understanding

and my will. All that I am and have thou hast given them to me. To thee, O Lord, I return them. Give me only thy love and thy grace."

This prayer is most perfect in expressing the creature's proper attitude to God. All nature feels the pulse of God in the movement of its activities of life. As such it moves to its appointed end, and in fulfilling that purpose it is at one with the will of God and in love with him. But below man there is no further acknowledgement, for there is no knowledge. The love lies in a kind of self-reverence and in giving—that is, in the diffusion of its own good. The world has been described by a poet as a censer swung by the hand of God, and its incense is the odour of sacrifice and adoration; or again it may be likened to the motion of stars in their orbit round a central sun, or, to use Aquinas' image, there is a vast circulation and an exodus from God in creation which finds its completion in the return of all creatures: "When that which drew from out the deep turns again home." But the mind of man is not satisfied with that unremitting worship which goes not beyond the narrow path of unconscious nature. Mind flies out beyond the flaming ramparts of the world, is moved by far-off visions, and is uneasy till it rests in

truth and goodness. There is indeed a limit even to its desires, because the capacity of love and understanding of all below God is finite. Man therefore naturally seeks his own level in human love, and tries to enjoy a partial realisation of what he wants. I say partial, because the state of man is a peculiar one. He has a definite station in the hierarchy of creation. He is body as well as mind, and his mind finds a natural delight in the spiritual embodied in sense, and in the companionship of fellow-men. But the soul is not immersed in the sensible, it has a secret inclination to ultimate truth, and has a certain discomfort in what is fleeting and mortal. Nature cannot slake its drought. Reason points out God, and conscience commands worship. But it is powerless to make the abstract vivid, to bring down the transcendent to earth. Natural religion has ever tried to do so, and has ended in a dim Pantheism or idolatry.

What, then, is the destiny of the soul left to its own unassisted powers? It is a question which has led to much theorising, but it need not detain us; for there is no such thing as nature unassisted. The story of man involves the generosity of God from the beginning. We live in a supernatural order, as theologians tell

us, and that is no more than to say that God's love has lifted man's desires and powers to the level of his own love and invited a union of equality between the finite and the infinite. Hence it is that man searches behind the appearances of nature for the face of God. As St Augustine tells us unforgettably, creatures cry out to us in our search, " We are not God; thou must go search beyond us." And again our Lord and the Church have given us word. " In thy very self he lies hidden, but it is not till you have died to self and given place to one greater than yourself that you will find him present."

Strange though this counsel may seem at first sight, it will on reflexion be found to accord with these same principles which have governed love so far. " Be yourself and give " is the law of inanimate as well as animate creation. You are steward of your own self and also your brother's keeper; your native goodness is God's, and so too is that of your neighbour. But now if the source of all goodness bows low to love you and enter under your roof, your own paltry goodness must not be first in your thoughts, for then there will be no room for the Guest. You must diminish that he may increase. You cannot of yourself

add an inch to your stature; if you wish to be lifted up, you must let another do it for you. If you would love and see with the eyes of perfect wisdom, then you must allow another to be so one with you that you see with his eyes, and all your thoughts and wishes become his. Unless the grain of wheat fall to the ground it cannot have life; and the life of God which is to be yours must be without qualification his. The part of the creature is to cede, to recognise its emptiness, to be a beggar without dowry. Sad to tell, the temple of the soul is all too frequently filled with merchandise. It is a bazaar, when it should be empty save for the instruments and apparel for sacrifice, and—here is the tragedy of life—the stock of the bazaar is preferred to that which is beyond price, the gift of God. Be it so, but there goes as a reminder of one's folly often enough a loneliness of soul and a weariness of spirit. Love mourns among the ashes of true desire and has bad dreams. Better to fast for joy than feast for sorrow, and by the tenets of all true philosophy as well as by the revelation of God we can learn that it is an evil thing to have forsaken the Love of God, which is the foundation and architecture of all that is good and the end to which all creation moves.

CHAPTER II

LOVE AND DESIRE

"Thou sparest all because they are thine, O Lord, who lovest souls."—*Wisdom* xi 29.

"As the hart panteth after the fountains of water, so my soul panteth after thee, O my God."—*Psalm* xli 1.

"O God, my God, for thee do I watch at break of day. For thee my soul hath thirsted; for thee my flesh, O how many ways!"—*Psalm* lxii 2.

LOVE has been the favourite theme of the makers of poetry and music, and indeed, of all those who have been busy with the arts. And rightly so, for every language has its proverbs or its legend of the irresistible potency of love, and the continued life of mankind on earth depends upon it. More prosaically the scientists and philosophers tell us of the mighty instinct which is responsible for so many of the activities of human nature. A man or woman who does not love awakens pity, and the best that we can do is to sigh that some day "surget amari aliquid"—some object may tremblingly awaken the silent and dusty chords to sound. Now usually those who have had experience tell us of two separate kinds of love,

the bondwoman and the free, the sensual and the pure, the ravager and the help-mate. In truth there is no mystery here, for in our divided being we know only too well that the lower may tie the higher to its chariot or the higher may lift its fellow to a peaceful and mellow union with its own desire. The two in all human affairs should co-operate, and on the one condition that reason and will are left on their thrones and do not abdicate.

And now we must ask why pay so much attention to love. It is notoriously the most perilous of emotions, and it disturbs that calm which is required for truth and dutiful actions. One great philosopher, Kant, felt this criticism so much that he banished love from morality and set in lonely grandeur the one principle of duty for duty's sake. Here he erred, happily for us, and erred grievously. The truth is that there is in even the least of God's creatures a quality of goodness which makes it desirable. There is "a freshness deep down things," as Gerard Hopkins discerned, and it is this freshness or fragrance from the divine workshop, which in its higher manifestation intoxicates the senses of man, and at all times is capable of moving the heart. Besides, there is a very profound consideration, which we must just touch upon.

Love is to all that exists as the spring time which awakens life to its true business and sends the blackbird and the thrush to their mates. All nature is bound hard and fast, motionless and dead like an iceberg in the Antarctic Ocean, without the activity which goes by many names and idealises itself in love. To be is most wonderful, but being is active always, and that energy, that movement, is procured by the Divine Cause, whose name is Love, while the energy itself is but a tributary motion. I like best to think of this truth under the image of myriad lamps lit by one great torch or cresset, flaming redly amid the surrounding darkness. But whatever the image we employ, the truth is there that love is the dynamic principle in all that exists. And it is in ourselves that we can see this most clearly, and perhaps most simply of all, if we take note of that word so often on our lips, " interest " or " interesting." We are always interested in something. Of some, no doubt, it can be said that they are interested in nothing, but this expression is an accepted exaggeration and means only that they have shortened their telescope and look only at what is very near. No living man is without interest in himself, and even suicide is an inverted love or disappointment. When interest disappears then

the object ceases to have any meaning for us, as the pathologists tell us and as diseases of the mind tend to prove. On the contrary, objects grow in meaning the more we are interested in them, so that it is accurate enough to say that in all our conduct and in all our knowledge there are two factors present, intellect and desire, and the motor which sets the intellect going and keeps it at work is that interest which is nothing but an eddy of the insatiable aspiration or tendency of our nature.

We are so accustomed to think of ourselves or our souls as bits of stuff, or as a hard case which remains unchanged, that we fail to realise the equally important truth that we are essentially an activity or substantial tendency. We move out from God by his initial stress on our being; we are always yearning for a thousand and one loves and are more than half in love with ourselves, and nevertheless all our life we are being drawn back to him as our end, the final Love, the plenary goodness whose livery creation wears. St. Augustine in one of his sermons describes this unerringly:

"Have the bodily senses pleasure and the spiritual senses none? If the spiritual senses have no pleasure, wherefore is it written: 'And the children of men shall put their trust

under the shadow of thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house, and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures. For with thee is the fountain of life, and in thy light shall we see light' (Psalm 35)? . . . Give me a lover and he will catch my meaning; give me a longer, give me an hungerer, give me a wanderer in the desert, athirst and gasping for the fountains of his eternal fatherland; give me such an one and he will catch my meaning. . . . Show a sheep a green bough and thou drawest him. Let a boy see some nuts and he is drawn by them. As they run they are drawn, drawn by taste, drawn without bodily hurt, drawn by a line bound to their heart. If then among earthly things, those that be sweet and pleasant, draw such as love them, as soon as they see them, so that it is truth to say, 'His special pleasure draweth each,' doth not that Christ, whom the Father hath revealed, draw? What stronger object of love can a soul have than the truth?"—*Twenty-sixth Homily on St John.*

But notice that the desire moves in the dark, our nature is not lit up within. There are dim corridors and catacombs, and our consciousness, like a candle, casts but a flickering light along the walls. Dark to ourselves, we have yet to

find our true happiness and grow to self-realisation, and we have to do this through the medium of those desires and interests which are begotten by contact with the external world and other persons. We are drawn this way and that, and know by experience the strength and weakness of the emotions, love and fear, reverence and hate, wonder and self-satisfaction; but it is sometimes news to us to be told that behind these skirmishes, these excursions and alarums, is the ever-moving army of the self, the Wandering Legion which seeks to be the host of God. We are creatures, therefore, who because of our poverty are desperately in want, and though many know it not, our hearts will be uneasy till they rest in God. God is our end, not by accident, but by his goodness, and our nature suffers from the nostalgia of the infinite, a homesickness which no philistine or epicurean ideal can assuage. This being so, it is easy to see the importance of love in life. Love is but a mode of interest or desire, and the name is given to that special desire which moves us to union with others. It belongs particularly to members of one species, because it needs some equality. The lover ceases to see himself as a separate individuality, or at any rate, if he be thwarted, the pain comes from the sense of separation

which he would overcome. In perfect love there is a new union and identity set up in which each member lives the life of the others, and shares all that he has and is. And what is more, each thinks that here is completion, a blessedness to which nothing can be added, an immortality in which there is no change. How far this is true, or whether in any condition it can be verified, must be considered in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

GOD AND HUMAN LOVE

" Thou art the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion for ever."—*Psalm* lxxii 26.

" I love them that love me, and they that in the morning early watch for me shall find me."—*Proverbs* viii 17.

LOVE has been called fickle and inconstant, and certainly it has to be watched and tended with care. Men and women differ in temperament, and while some by nature cling to a first love, others are more mercurial, quick to be stirred and quick to forget, and subject to periodic crises. This is a defect of nature which can be remedied in time. I say nature, but really it is our body and natural dispositions which are at fault, and as these are never dead weights which cannot be lifted, it is a mistake to surrender to them. So to do is to succumb, unconsciously perhaps, to the deadly heresy of fatalism. We each have our Sparta, and it is our duty to make it a city beautiful. The soul has for its function to make the best of its inheritance and character, and there are infinite possibilities here, which the saint and the men with motive power

who carry a baton in their knapsack, reveal. There is nothing which stirs our heart to admiration for human nature more than the spectacle of one whose soul is alive, working furiously or serenely at the creation of an ideal personality; just as there is nothing sadder than to see a person with talents, fortune, and physical capability sinking to the level of a brute or a thing. And to return to love, it ill befits a man to let the ideal which reason and desire made clear at marriage time be subject to the changing moods and spasms of after-days. Feelings are bound to vary in their strength, but they are not, or should not be, independent of the deliberate and discriminating motive of the self. Just as in the State, passion should never rule but reinforce a policy chosen deliberately, or be entirely set aside, so, too, the ideal of love should remain untarnished, no matter what provocation or trial it may have to endure. The passionate moment of love gives an opportunity which it were tragedy to neglect, for by its light the beauty of life and others' souls is discerned, as when the clouds clear from the hillsides and reveal the scattered hill farms and the sheep and heather and massed pine trees. In the love which carries one to unknown heights, it is possible to see others in

their love and sufferings transfigured, and when the brightness of the vision is dimmed, the memory of it should leave a deeper sympathy with, and finer understanding of, the kindred lives of mankind. And if this fail, there is still a memory which should keep the marriage-bond immutable—a memory of a God who was more than faithful to his promises to a back-sliding race, and has always kept his promise of forgiveness and love for us despite our many trespasses.

But it is not with the relation of fickle passion to constancy that this chapter is primarily concerned. Rather would one dwell on the temporal and passing quality of what we long to have everlastingly. Fugitive time, like a stream, carries all that is best away, and we ourselves have no resting-place. The most common complaint against Heaven is, I think, that it does not give us back what we have lost, and however great its promises, it cannot make up for some love, now gone or passing, which touches our heart with silent joy. Looking back over our lives, we can live in memory certain incidents, a reunion with one dearly loved, or a parting; we can recall faces now changed, but once beautiful; characters who have strewn flowers in their path, the breath of

whose perfume still brings tears to the eyes. There are scenes at evening by the fireside, or in the hills, in far-off places amid laughter or silence, there are tiny objects, toys or animals, there are successes and even failures, which are rewarded by undeserved kindness and affection, and they have all passed away. " Où sont les neiges d'antan ?" " Death blots black out; nor mark is any of him at all so stark but vastness blurs, and time beats level." Beneath the hands of the spectral clock of life are inscribed the words, " Pereunt et reputantur " (They pass and are now but a chronicle). And so summer succeeds spring, and autumn time comes with its anticipation of death, but in the recurring seasons there is only an illusion of permanence. The lover lives a moment of eternity in his beloved, parents tenderly watch their children, and children see the future far stretched before them full of dreams and fair achievements. But the toys from Mycenae and the relics of Pompeii, the portraits that stare down at us from the walls, are so many signs to us that, if the dead still speak, they speak from the tomb, and it is the tomb which will swallow up all our experiences and love within its narrow embrace.

This is the burthen of human nature, and it is in parenthesis a weighty evidence for the

desire for immortality. Composed of matter and spirit, the self is ever attempting to catch what it desires and immortalise it, and instead it finds that it has captured a trophy for the museum. But all the while deliverance is near at hand, and as we might expect, it is God who gives us what we desire. The Sermon on the Mount is full of good tidings and divine answers, but there is scarcely anything more wonderful in it than the passage on Providence and the revelation of God as our Father. He is shown to us as one who cares for even the least of his creatures. He knows them all by name. He counts the hairs of our head. He bids us not be solicitous for the morrow. The Revelation is the death-knell of pessimism, and completely changes the picture of the Universe. We pass from Fate to Providence. Nature, which oppressed the spirit of man with its disregard for his hopes, is the house of our Father which he has put at our disposal. It is impossible to exaggerate this change. To bring it home we must each consult the fear that lurks behind our undertakings, which clouds the future with doubt, and has pictured death with a scythe and destiny under the image of the three Sisters. Let each one for himself, if he still doubt the significance of the Sermon on the

Mount, turn to his favourite anthology and look up the passages on Time and Death. Perhaps the burthen of their song may best be summed up in the word " inexorable "—the inexorable which man may uselessly defy or patiently obey. Amongst the highest expressions of this attitude are the concluding words of Philoctetes, which I cannot refrain from quoting:

" Farewell, O plain of Lemnos girt by the sea, and do thou send me blameless on fair voyaging, whither the mighty fate doth convey me, and the good will of friends and the all-mastering god who hath decreed this."*

Now the happiest dream of man is companionship with the gods and the discovery of love even among the ruins of hope. He had to wait in suspense for a sure fulfilment of the dream for the coming of him who was made flesh and dwelt amongst us. Other religions and philosophies had glimpsed a truth beyond the appearance of mortality and the silence of the gods, but the advent of the Saviour had to be couched in myth, and philosophy never yet saved souls. The Incarnation was a fact, and Christ existed and was seen and handled, and his first public utterance gave the startling

* The *Philoctetes* of Sophocles, ll. 1464-68.

news that all the highest was personal; God existed in three Persons; the world was his, and even every movement in it possessed a meaning, and could be construed as the gesture of a friend. Now it makes all the difference to our outlook and conduct whether we see the unknown process of nature as indifferent to us and purposeless in our regard, or as controlled and adapted for our good by a benevolent God. There is as much difference as that between hieroglyphics and a love-poem written for our benefit; and our life is now seen to fit into a scheme which includes the firmament and furthest star, and in the scheme we each have our own becoming part. By this means the humblest life is saved from oblivion and the chorus of the pessimists is silenced. And if it be asked, Where does love come into all this? the answer is that Providence means that God cares for us, and that such care is the outcome of love. We do not work fruitlessly in an employment within an iron system, but in a household where affection makes the yoke easy and the burden light.

The good tidings do not, however, stop short at this. Not only does God care for us, but he gives permanence and value to all that seemed passing. "Esto perpetua." I have

spoken of that bitter-sweet experience of happiness which is the more poignant because we know that we are so soon to lose it. Joy, as a poet has written, is ever at the gate of life bidding adieu. And yet the Christian knows in his heart of hearts that this is false. He is like Parsifal in Wagner's version of the legend, who watched in wonder the wintry fields ripen and stark trees blossom before his eyes, and when he called for an explanation of this mystery, the answer came that that day was Good Friday, the day of the Redemption. We have to learn that if we abide in Christ then all else abides as well; for the Word does not dissipate but unite, and Christ gives increase and brings a final division only between good and evil. Mankind was aware darkly of its immortal destiny, and though it often enough pictured those who had passed away as the strengthless dead or as spirits which haunted tombs in the night-time, it gave them an after-existence, however shadowy. But, as compared with this twittering uncertainty, how triumphantly confident is the Christian message! From the first, St Paul preached the hope of the Resurrection, and all who read the early Christian literature must have noticed with astonishment the emphasis laid on immortality, as though the doctrine were

entirely new to the pagan world. As the Christians understood it, the doctrine was indeed new, for to them it meant a new life, a resetting of all things in Christ.

We must take this last expression literally. The Word made flesh resumed all things in himself, and as his word never fails so shall nothing that can be united with it perish. In sober truth our own lives have been lifted into the eternal, which is equally present in the past and the future and conservative of both. The Kingdom of God is full of innocents, from the babes of Bethlehem slain by Herod to the good thief who found himself in paradise. And, furthermore, in this Communion of Saints the false tears and ugly memories will have disappeared in Purgatory, and all the treasured moments of our life will be not so much repeated as rediscovered in one immense joy. And let us not put it beyond the power of the Father and the Son, who know what is in man to perpetuate not only all that is rich and conspicuous in the pattern of our lives, but much else besides. We shall have our friends and those whom we wished to know and knew not, and every experience will be afire in the grace of the redemptive love. But it may be said, so many of the dearest incidents or memories seem so trivial; they are

connected with fleeting seconds or hours, and depend on a look, an old melody, a gesture, and have their special locality and time. In the last war often enough what most appealed to those under orders for death was the memory of a fireside, of laughter in the garden, or the smell of rain-washed lanes or places which the marching songs record. Yet if these memories have any worth whatsoever, they will pass from memory to reality again in paradise. They have been once, and in so being they have received a quality which fades not, through the causality of God in which they live and move and have their being. God creates, conserves, and concurs, and were this not enough we have the seal of the blood of the Redemption.

CHAPTER IV

AFFECTION AND DETACHMENT

"Because thou art Lord of all, thou makest thyself gracious to all."—*Wisdom* xii 16.

"Many waters cannot quench charity, neither can the floods drown it."—*Canticle* viii 7.

IT has been assumed in the last chapter that the love of other persons and things does not interfere with the love of God. But it may well be asked whether this is so, and whether such a view does not conflict with the accepted maxims and advice of almost all spiritual writers. There is a mystery here which I do not think human thought can unravel, but as it is no idle question some discussion of it will not be wasted. The ascetic principle that we must sacrifice all human love and fasten our desires and will on God alone has been so emphasised as to depress many souls. Hagiographers sometimes seem to find a melancholy delight in stressing the saints' disregard of those nearest and dearest to them. We are all familiar with the unfounded story that St Francis Xavier would not meet his

mother, and the same kind of pious tale is narrated with differences of detail of some other saints. Again, we cannot avoid noticing that the saints are unanimous in preaching detachment from creatures. A well-known medieval work on the mystical life is entitled *The Cloud of Unknowing*. St John of the Cross carries his disciples with him to the regions of Nada or nothingness, and there teaches us the marvels of the uncreated Love and Light. St Ignatius again, in the very foundation of his *Exercises*, lays down the principle of indifference, and then proceeds quietly to weigh the balance down in favour of spiritual and actual poverty, and love of dishonour and humility. And, lastly, if we turn to Holy Scripture, we find the inspired writer's declaration that God is a jealous God. Our Lord himself told the young man to give up all to follow him, and said that he who did not hate his father and his mother and his kindred was not worthy of him.

There is no gainsaying, then, that there is some fundamental truth in the doctrine of utter detachment. But there is also something to be said on the other side. The saints are sometimes supposed to have been without humanity, but the strange fact is that the better we come

to know them the more human they appear to be, and with a humanity which does not a whit diminish their holiness. St Paul had so large a heart that he could love and sympathise with all his converts. He is tender, joyful, disappointed, and sometimes exasperated with his dearly beloved children. St Bernard, again, kept an impassive face for a time at the death of his younger brother, but he broke down and was not ashamed to own the love which he had never destroyed. A somewhat similar story is told of St Jane Frances de Chantal, after the death of her son; and who does not know the death scene of St Francis, that true lover of Christ, and how he sent for his dear sister, as he called her, Fra Giacoma, the Roman dame, who used to feed him with little cakes and sweetmeats? Both St Theresa and St John of the Cross bear witness in their correspondence to the truth that saints can love their friends, and there are few more touching words than those of St Francis Xavier in a letter to one Cypriano: "O Cypriano, if you but knew the affection with which I write to you these things, day and night you would think of me; perhaps you would weep at the memory of my great love for you. If the hearts of men could be seen in this life, I believe, my brother

Cypriano, that you would see yourself clearly in my soul."

And if this be not enough we have the command of Christ Himself that we should love one another.

Those who drive the doctrine of detachment to its extreme limit are not always aware of the conclusions which they are bound to hold. They forget that the saints themselves are human, that our Lady is not God, and that even the humanity of Christ is a creature. The Communion of Saints and the constant teaching of the Church are sure guides that the love of God does not forbid us to love what is finite, and since this is so, detachment cannot be taken as a universal law independent of other laws and principles.

What, then, is the answer to this riddle? It is impossible, I think, to show the proper function of detachment save in the setting of the supernatural order, and for this reason the penances of the saints, their withdrawal from much that the world holds dear, must be inexplicable to the pagan and uninitiated. St Paul spoke of the folly of the Cross, a stumbling-block to the Gentile, but to the Christian the power and the wisdom of God, and the same verdict holds true today as yesterday. But we

can approach an answer by clearing up some misapprehensions and preparing the way. First of all we must have right ideas about God; otherwise we shall be afraid of him and picture him as a hard Master. God, as we have said, is Goodness and the giver of goodness. He spends himself and remains unspent. Think well over this, for it means that God does not subtract or set up rivalries. He does not enter into comparison with his creatures. Their beauty and goodness does not detract from his perfection, for all that they have and are comes from him and shows forth his nature in a finite far-off way. We do not, therefore, rob God by love of his creatures, but praise him, and it was his intention that we should learn of him through them. In the theme of the *Hound of Heaven*, fear besets the poet lest "having him I may have nought beside," and the revelation at the end is that you cannot enjoy creatures without God, and that if you love God, then and then alone do creatures become fully lovable. If God had been a creature, then possibly love for him would have spelt a division between him and others, but he is their Lord and they all declare his name to us. God, therefore, let us repeat, does not give with one hand and take away with the other;

he is the Giver of all good gifts, and a bounteous and not a covetous God.

Now turn to man. God is his end, and any desire which takes away from God is bad. But this platitude does not carry us very far. What is of vital importance, though it is sometimes neglected in a discussion of this subject, is the make-up of man and the consequent method he must normally follow to know and love God. Human nature is both sensitive and spiritual, and knowledge begins with and develops by the aid of sense-experience. Again it would appear that we have a number of instincts which clamour for legitimate satisfaction, and our character is formed for good or ill by the way we control and elevate them. Lastly, we are self-acting natures which are at first dark to themselves. Progress means self-perfection and the discovery of the dark mystery of our own self. And note this well, a condition of growth in self-knowledge is the knowledge of what is not ourselves. Any doctor will tell us that a child would become an idiot if it could not learn from nature, family and friends. To be thyself thou must go outside thyself, and the more thou art all things, the more thou shalt live a complete life. Mowgli, according to Rudyard Kipling, was an intelligent stripling, but it is more likely that without

language or human intercourse he would have been a mentally deficient suffocated human. Life, therefore, in childhood requires fellowship, and even the grown-up are meant normally to live in society and not in isolation.

What follows from these facts? Well, first that God intended we should know him by the help of creatures. That is why we who have to learn through our senses have a world of myriad hues and shapes wherein to live and grow. God is a spirit and invisible and we do not meet him in experience. For a similar reason, given our make-up, we have to use our God-given instincts. Thereby we come to be persons and can give a proper service to our Lord, and in the realisation of our selves we gain the most complete knowledge that is possible to us naturally of the divine Being who dwells within us, after whose image we have been created. If we join, then, these truths to that of the goodness of all creation, we shall be able to see what is the justification of love of things and finite persons, and we can begin to understand too the meaning and purpose of detachment. Created objects do not interfere with the knowledge of God; their purpose is to reveal him, and they are specially suited for man's intellect, which cannot gaze at the divine

splendour. Each creature is, moreover, good and admirable in a unique way. So neither from the side of the creature nor from the nature of the human mind is there anything to make the love of creatures an impediment to the love of God. On the contrary, we might suppose from what has hitherto been said that the love of the creature was necessary, at any rate at the beginning, for any love of God. But now comes a shadow over human love. Were man able to love according to the intrinsic worth of the creature, to see it as it really is, and as a symbol of a higher beauty, then peace would reign upon earth. The truth is, however, that this blessed state is reserved for Heaven. Here on earth the least experience of ourselves and of history shows us that a true and ordered love is sadly rare. Whether it be that Original sin has disorganised the soul and its faculties, or for some other reason, men and women are for ever forgetting true love for lust, and giving their affection to what is unworthy and bowing down in idol-worship.

Hence it is that the truth that creatures are lovable has to be corrected by a principle which is salutary and practical. There is first of all definite evil which has to be avoided; and secondly, in our relations with what is good we

have to recognise that our love of it may be exaggerated and may blind us to our true good. The extent to which we have to be on our guard will vary with each one of us, but no one can be fool enough to think he is safe from all temptation. Some sects believe that the mind of man is so prone to evil that he must avoid all human love and all pleasure in human relationships, and Puritanism is a habit of mind which turns with eyes averted from much that is innocent and merry. Catholicism lays down the goodness of life and creatures as a principle; but in practice the Church is wise and warns us off many an apparently innocent occasion, and bids us fast and abstain, and discipline our desires. She knows well that passion makes us forgetful of all else, and that our tastes are very imperfect. Some fair but finite object bewitches us till it fills the whole universe in our eyes, and this is idol worship, the putting of the creature in the place of God. There are, indeed, certain natural relationships which we are meant always to reverence and love. Such are the ties of family or nature. Catholic social theory always puts the family first in its programme, and we know how often Catholics have resented the charge of being anti-natural. These loves are sound, and involve an obligation. Not only must we

not strive to detach ourselves from family or country, but we have a duty towards them. Here, then, we have examples where our very love of God obliges us to be attached to creatures.

Nevertheless, it is possible to love family and country too much, so that we are not altogether free from the law of detachment. Family love becomes idolatry if it lead a son to cheat or do any kind of wrong for the sake of his mother, and we are all aware how nationalism may be exaggerated and lead to evil. Moreover, —and here another factor comes into play— in our choices upon earth we may have to give up one good course of action for another. I say choice of action deliberately and not love. A man may have to leave his mother or wife to serve his country, and this means detachment in choice and action, though he give not up one jot of his love for those formerly dear to him. Similarly a priest or nun gives up marriage and may take a vow of poverty. Marriage is a holy contract, made still more holy by a sacrament, but even a sacrament should give way to the evangelical counsels. When a man or woman has to make the choice, his feelings will generally be on the side of the lesser good, and it is for this reason that St Ignatius Loyola daringly says that those in doubt should pray

that God may give them the harder. He knew human nature and realised that for a just decision the balance must be tipped in favour of what is more distasteful to human nature. Our Lord conveyed the same message when he said that it is necessary to hate one's kindred. The choice to leave one's home and family to walk with him involves in action, though not in disposition of mind, a hatred of those forsaken. So far as affection is concerned, however, the monk or nun does not cease to love. Indeed, the love is increased, for the right relation is established between God, oneself and one's family and relations. The love is well-ordered and belongs to the virtue of charity.

If then even the pure forms of affection such as that of family are capable of being exaggerated and inordinate, it is easy to see how essential a spirit of detachment is to preserve a right proportion in our judgements and decisions. And so we can lay down the following propositions, that God must be loved with our whole heart and mind and strength, and since all creation is good, and therefore a help to the love of God, there is no intrinsic opposition between love of God and love of creatures. But secondly, since human nature is liable to be swayed by feelings and passions, and to lose sight of God

and of the true relation of finite loves to their source, it is necessary ever to cultivate a spirit of detachment, that our affections may be well-ordered. These conclusions by no means end the subject, but future discussion will go more easily into a new chapter.

CHAPTER V

SELF-DENIAL

"The things that were gain to me the same I have counted loss for Christ."—*Philippians* iii 7.

"Till the day break and the shadows retire, I will go to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense."—*Canticle* iv 6.

GOOD, as we know, is not always pleasurable, and it needs character to follow duty when pleasure summons. This well-known truth of experience has been treated in the preceding chapter. But there are also different types of pleasure. There is a certain joy in study which is different from that of novel-reading. Both are permissible, but the good of the first is as a rule higher than that of the second, and yet the inclination to the latter is often the stronger. There is, again, a pleasure in service, in alms-giving, in self-sacrifice; but the pleasures of ease, of gain, may easily win the day when the two pleasures are in conflict. To acquire the habit of constantly choosing the better course, there must be present a very definite and strong motive, a permanent resolve to practise detachment. Detachment, that is, and perfection go together.

We can see the same truth from another angle. Ancient writers, as we have already said, distinguished various degrees or kinds of love—the love of utility, the love of pleasure, the love of friendship, and, again, the love of concupiscence and that of benevolence. I may love another because his friendship is profitable to me, and though such an attachment sounds ugly, let us not despise it too much, for it is very prevalent. The boy's attachment to his master, the servant to an employer, the weak to the strong, is strengthened, if not constituted, by the profit which comes from such friendships. The master, on the other hand, and the strong are pleased with the acknowledgement of their value, and they return the love. Or it may be again that certain of our acquaintances are a great comfort to us, they are good listeners or sympathetic or like-minded. Here is the second class of lovers, and it covers a vast multitude. There is nothing to be ashamed of in such friendships; their only fault may well be that they do not reach to the highest excellence of love. This latter love is freed, so far as is possible, from any taint of selfishness. It worships at another shrine than itself, and spends itself on behalf of the loved object. It has various names—altruistic, disinterested, bene-

volent, generous, unselfish, self-sacrificing, pure love.

It is easy to see that the highest form of love is arduous and at times heroic, and there are degrees within it. I will not here discuss whether love of this kind can exist without any admixture of self. That point will come later, but clearly he who experiences this love knows it for the highest of delights and yet thinks of nothing but the beloved. Philosophers and theologians call these two elements concupiscence and benevolence, according as they dominate. Neither name is very happy in our language, and it is necessary to point out that concupiscence here is by no means identical with lust, and that benevolence is not the goodwill of an old gentleman. The distinction lies in this, that in the one, love is still selfish, while in the second selfishness has, so far as it is possible, vanished. Now to analyse the state of passionate love is very difficult, and usually it is only at the ebb-tide that we can estimate the worth of our emotion. The passion has gone, and with the passing come reflexion and knowledge of our state. Sometimes our promises are fulfilled and the affection endures, and then the passion proves itself to have been pure. But deception is very easy. Hamlet

did not love Ophelia, but the image of love; Tristram and Iseult loved to their own undoing, and looked not to the true good of each other; Othello loved Desdemona, but reached not to the self-sacrifice of a Cordelia, who never gave thought to herself. An act of pure love cannot perhaps be divorced from the good of the lover himself, but we can see how close to separation they can go in St Anselm's words: "I seek nothing but thyself, even though no reward were promised; even though there were no Heaven nor Hell, yet would I adhere to thee for thy sweet kindness and for thyself."

If, then, we sum up the differences in love as those between the selfish or self-satisfying and the unselfish, it will be seen how difficult and yet desirable it is to strive after the purer form of unselfishness. And what is this but self-denial, detachment making itself felt as an essential factor in perfect goodness? We have but to consult ourselves to realise how deep-seated is this regard for self. It is the assertion of our own nature which cannot be, and should not be, entirely suppressed. But its lowest manifestations are abhorrent to all right-minded people, such as the inclinations to grab, to possess, to receive, and not to give. The desire, on the other hand, to live nobly, to attain one's

own perfection, has self for its final end, but all admit the morality of such a desire, and some even put it forward as the moral ideal. And yet if it be so, it must not take up all the attention, so occupying the mind that all one's motives and desires are reduced to it, for then we pass true love with eyes astray or closed, and miss the great secret that to find life you must lose it, that you must give up all to find all. Indeed, those who have met love must have grown impatient with all this discussion. Self-perfection and sober advancement in virtue! Forsooth there are better things to think of than these sorry nags. And as for mortification, was there ever such a pain as love? Pain and sacrifice, they are the very stuff of true love, as martyrdom is felicity for a saint. "Place me a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thy arm, for love is strong as death. Many waters cannot quench it, neither can the floods drown it. If a man give all the substance of his house for love, he shall despise it as nothing."

But a reader may interrupt here judicially or somewhat sorrowfully: What of those who do not yet love God, so as to feel the passion described in that text from Wisdom? The problem remains and vexes still. There is a truth here we must recognise. God does not

come suddenly at the dawn of intelligence and steal the heart away, save in the case of some very rare souls. God is known by creatures, and by the living memory of Jesus Christ abiding in his Church. The love of God grows peacefully and imperceptibly, and has its own special laws of growth. How fidelity passes into affection, and affection into union, is God's secret which he has revealed in the spiritual teaching of the Catholic Church. In the next chapter the plan of it will be suggested. At this point a full answer cannot be given to those who complain of the silence of God and the coldness of their own hearts. But a partial answer is already contained in what has been stated, and since the principles of it are of great importance, I will repeat them in a different form.

God is most lovable in himself, and he is the flame which sets light to all human desires. Now these desires are many, and some are fulfilled by definite finite objects. Yet the desire itself of the heart is not appeased, and never can be till it find its true home, the House beautiful of God himself, "lucem quam inhabitas." This first truth must, however, be balanced by a second, which is that God is so perfect and pure that he cannot be known save inadequately by

the human mind. Moreover, the human mind moves slowly towards a worthy understanding of him. It moves out of darkness through the senses, and throughout life, as a rule, the senses partner the mind. They provide us with a living presence, and from that presence in its image in memory comes the emotion of love. Now God who made us knows our nature, and has taught us how to love him, a pure Spirit, and overcome the counter-attraction of the senses and feelings. We are told, "If you would love me, keep my commandments," and we are shown that way of discipline which leads to the vision and enjoyment of wisdom. That discipline involves detachment. The sense experience points to something higher than itself; the love of the creature should be an indication of beauty and goodness unimpaired. It is very easy to stop when feelings excite and sense lends enchantment. This we know only too well. "The flesh lusteth against the spirit"; "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." "What is better I approve, but I follow the worse." And it looks as though many accept what is flattering to the senses, and live a life in which the higher reaches of the soul are left unexplored. It is comfortable down in the valleys, and there is a wintry air in the Hima-

layan heights of sanctity. What then happens? The desire for the more excellent way weakens, and the vulgar does duty for what is rare and, in the best sense of the word, aristocratic. The only sure remedy is to forswear the easy and vulgar, and to practise the hard. Human loves must be sacrificed, at least in fact, in order that the divine should be appreciated. The law of life is that we have to pay for what is noble. What is high is arduous, and the arduous demands effort. Our chronic laziness makes us, when at school, miss the opportunities to study, to listen to good music, to practise at the arts and crafts. Our taste develops, but if we would keep the power to discern what is really beautiful, and to create, then we have to avoid the temptation to be satisfied with the second-rate. This temptation has overpowered many an artist and writer—and they are not the only ones who are prone to fall. The law is universal. The wine-taster has to be fastidious lest his talent be dulled, and the athlete has to be an ascetic lest his strength turn to flabbiness.

In the life of religion the moral whispered to us from every quarter has its supreme application. God, who is fairer than any dream, demands for due appreciation for that very reason a more perfect discipline of the mind and

heart. And that our love be contemplative, be unselfish, we have to practise detachment all the days of our life. Self-sacrifice and prayer, these are the two watchwords of the spiritual life, and they, as we shall now see, spring from and go with the spirit of faith in the divine promises.

Before beginning this subject, it will be well to add an appendix to what has been said about God. God, we have said, is Love. He is the Giver, and he gives us all that we cherish, and he also gives us himself in a way which we shall have to explain later. But though this is the complete and final truth about God's attitude to us, God, if I may so put it, has to behave to us in a way which superficially seems far removed from love! He is, as the Scripture tells us, a jealous God, and the sense in which we must understand this attitude is, jealous for our best interests. Nothing we have seen enters into rivalry with him, and to those who have tasted of his beauty this truth is clearer than the noon-day sun. But to those whose desires are unstable, whose minds are fascinated by every toy and glittering object of delight, the truth is very far from obvious. And just as a wise mother watches over her children and has to be apparently cruel at times to keep them from

fatal habits or foolish adventures, so, too, God is jealous, and threatens us when we set up false idols and worship to our own destruction.

In the light of this truth, many things which may have perplexed us will become clear. Some there are who have been scandalised by the God depicted in the Old Testament, a harsh God as they say, who is angry and fierce, who compels his people to obedience by terrifying examples and sudden descents upon those who trifle with his words. Yet it is no mockery to say that God's action is love disguised, and that he chose the very way which would convince Israel of his care for it. To confirm this, let me quote a parallel example from modern life. There are parishes in England where the inhabitants live a hard life, and despite great virtues, show a certain roughness of mind. A priest who, acting on the principle of charity, uses nothing but gentleness, is, *experto crede*, likely to have his mildness interpreted as softness. He will do better on occasions to mix his gentleness with an apparent severity. Then, as has been proved by many priests, he will be regarded with admiration and affection. Almost the greatest devotion to a priest as a man of God I have known was shown by an Ulsterman, who sang a song of the priest's power with a shillelah.

The people of Israel would have been ashamed of Jehovah, if he had shown less power than the god of Baal; they saw, then, God's love for them in that aspect, and however inadequate the conception, it was no lying description. False ideas of God have been prevalent in every relig on save the God-guided faith of the chosen people and in Christianity, but there is an infinite distance between a false and an inadequate idea. No single attribute which the mind conceives can do justice to the single all comprehensive virtue, which is the divine essence. For that reason we have to multiply the names of God. He is Wisdom, Power, and Goodness. He is One, he is Infinite, he is Love. Love is the best summary, but it loses contact unless we continually supplement it with thoughts about his Justice and his Changelessness. It is our own multicoloured nature which prevents us from seeing God in his simplicity. His love, when it reaches us, bursts into many colours like Bengal lights. Thus we would not know God if we saw no evidence of his justice, and the saints were wiser than we are when they saw even Hell in the perspective of his love. We who are not saints have to beware of addressing God under only one name. The Church has never made this mis-

take, but outside her Communion the character of Jesus Christ is sentimentalised only too frequently by an exclusive emphasis on his lovableness, and a caricature of the Saint of Assisi has been quoted as portraying the one true disciple of the Master.

CHAPTER VI

SUPERNATURAL LOVE

"The light of thy countenance is signed upon us. Thou hast given gladness in my heart."—*Psalm* iv 7.

"My sister, my spouse, is a garden enclosed, a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed up."—*Canticle* iv 12.

THE secret of the Christian life lies in these two words, supernatural charity. In fact, they contain so much that a writer is in despair to convey their meaning to those who have no corresponding appreciation of them. Unfortunately, this word charity has lost its primitive beauty by misuse, and now it means many things. But just as the snow which falls from the sky gives us a fresh understanding of the beauty of whiteness, and even the swan looks dusky on the lake beside it, so all our ideals of love look soiled before this new love come down from heaven. The exultation of the early Christians is natural. They lived amid persecutions with perpetual spring in their hearts, for they had no mortal lover.

All, then, that is to follow will be vain if the reader has not assured himself that human love,

human ideals, the best which he can picture or desire are far below what Christianity means by charity. To put this in another way, charity as a supernatural virtue is not a higher degree of love than the love we know; it is as different as a human voice from a letter, as home from a pleasure-resort, as maternal love from the child's love of a doll.

There are evenings, especially in the autumn season, when a familiar countryside can so change before our eyes that its beauty almost frightens us. The rays of the setting sun turn the dull yellows and browns to gold; the shadows on the hills are purple, and the cattle in the fields, like the trees and farms, are deathly still and made of fairy colours.

Such is the effect of grace on nature. When the supernatural is added to human love, it is as when an aromatic plant is set in a room and fills it with fragrance, or as when a drop of some essence is united with scentless water. The mysterious change is, indeed, so wonderful that we must multiply images to see its likeness. Were a wren to fall in love with a nightingale, and in the dark to find itself singing with the liquid notes of its new mate, we should have found a fair comparison. The shepherd boy with his cracked voice plays upon his reed,

and behold he is piping the same music as the Son of David, and drawing the flocks to green pastures. The secret of supernatural charity is union, and the word of revelation is "in Christ." To be "in Christ" is to be lifted up and made a sharer in what is divine, as a thin piece of gut can be fixed to the sounding-board of a violin and stroked into sound. St Paul saw a change from one state of nature into another. Before Christ the world existed as a universe or united whole, with its natural principles, and man was the progeny of Adam; but with the advent of the Lord all this universe was grouped in a different unity and perspective, and man became graced in Christ, reborn into his life and animated by his Spirit. "Behold, I make all things new!" "The old things have passed away." All is resumed, restored in Christ, the firstborn of all the ages. "Now I live, no! not I, but Christ liveth in me." We are like the jars of water at Cana. At one word from Christ, our watery souls have been mingled with wine. "Thou who didst marvellously form our human nature, and more marvellously re-form it, grant us by the mystery of wine and water to become sharers in the divine nature through Christ our Lord."

By grace, then, we are united with Christ

in a new life, which is his. We are wound, to paraphrase a line of Gerard Hopkins, with Christ round and round as if with air. And as this new circuit of life is centred in Christ, the union is closer and higher than any we know of, whether in family or State, transending even all love of self. And, again, since union is love, the expression of it and juncture of it are called by a special word, Charity. If we follow out this thought we shall be able to see why the Redemption is God's great work of charity, why the Church of Rome is described by Ignatius as having the presidency of the love feast; and the Holy Eucharist and the other Sacraments, the principle of self-abnegation, the Christian horror of schism, will take on a new significance.

To illustrate this. We are recommended always to make the morning offering. That is, we should unite our intentions and our day with Christ. Thereby we are made conscious of the infinite loving power within us by grace. We, so to speak, switch on the great current of divine love which courses through the medium of our poor selves. Again, we ought in the strength of this new love to strive to put into practice the new commandment of love given at the Last Supper. We have to love even as our Lord loves; and we know that the love of Christ for his

own is comparable with the love of the Father and the Son. "That the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them." Those others whom we are bidden to love are not merely the human beings whom we are disposed naturally to like or dislike; they are Christ's, and of a divine worth, and our affection for them should have a corresponding purity and height. All the faithful are united in one bond and one life, as members with a head, as branches with a Vine, and the visible Body, therefore, which is the Church is kept from dismemberment by charity.

Whichever way we turn we find applications or aspects of this great truth. Its very shrine is the Holy Eucharist, the atoning and transfiguring presence of the Son of God, the Body of Christ whereby we have eternal life. The Sacraments are the channels of unity, and the holy and suffering dead are our brothers in communion with us because of their life in Christ. The infallible word of the Master is heard again every day in his Church because of his Presence there, and our utter obedience to authority is but another word for that charity which says to the divine lover, "no longer I but thou."

In this chapter I would dwell on the motive

which should govern our acts of love. Towards our neighbours we should be actuated by the same love which our Lord showed towards them. That is the ideal, a pure redemptive love which is ready to cast aside all selfish considerations for another soul. But there is a second motive. Our neighbour is a member of Christ, and should, like Christ himself, draw out our deepest affections. For this reason human love and family affection have a superadded beauty in the Christian life. Towards our Lord himself obviously no mean love will suffice; or, rather, the generosity of our Lord appreciates even a mean love, if it be not merely servile. But he deserves something higher. By grace he is our better self. He contains us more than we contain him. He is before us in our exchange of love, and gives us even the strength to turn to him. He seconds all the movements of our soul, and they terminate and are lost in his abounding goodness. Hence our love should be of a quality worthy of our new estate; and since that state is one of divine amity and union, that love must strive to be most pure in its motive. I who am already his by grace must consummate that alliance by giving him myself in thought and will. I cannot truly be said to belong to him as he wishes, " I in you, and you

in me, that we may wend into one," unless my love is purified of all self-esteem. Dispossessed of myself, I possess him by right of his supernatural gift.

The only fitting love, therefore, for a Christian is the pure and disinterested, and the Church makes this clear in its doctrine of contrition. An act of perfect contrition is, as we know, sufficient to bring us into peace with Christ after sin; it alone is effective to gain a plenary indulgence,* and the faithful are always being encouraged to practise such acts. The reason for this should be now clear. Christ our Lord loves with a supreme love; we are caught up into his life and love by grace; therefore our natural disposition in this supernatural state should be of a like kind with that of our Lord. This means perfect love or divine charity both towards our neighbour and the life of our life, Jesus Christ. Many a poet has spoken of himself as being a conduit of divine song. He uses a daring image for that ecstatic state, in which he seems to be seized and lifted above himself. He is, nevertheless, lonely, and it is his own song which he sings. The image passes into reality only in the connubial act of grace when the human soul and Christ become one life. No wonder, then, that

* Needless to say, other conditions are required.

our conversation should be in Heaven, and that there is a deathless beauty in the Saint's attitude towards his fellow-men. Where he is, Christ is, and that invisible presence is as operative as when the Word spoke in Galilee and died for love upon the Cross.

If we ponder over this sublime fact, we shall be able more easily to appreciate the precepts of charity laid down by the Church and also its applications. When we have lost the gift of grace by mortal sin, our acts are lonely once more and without divine virtue. We break the marriage bond and divorce ourselves. To return needs an act on our part which is called perfect contrition, save at confession when, as it is said, an act of attrition suffices. Both these acts fall under charity; the first is motivated by a pure act of love, and perfection here is demanded because love, to reach the level of Christ's love, must be without any selfishness. Pure love means that the devil of selfishness has gone and left the door open for the entry of Christ.

Now in the sacrament of Penance attrition has the same effect, and the reason is this. There is love in attrition though the motive be mixed with fears and some selfish regard; but Christ comes by main force in the Sacra-

ment with all the power of the Redemption in his train, and if there be a beginning even of loving response, his love is irresistible and unites the soul to himself.

What motive suffices for love in the sacrament of Penance has been clearly laid down by the Council of Trent. The Council declares that imperfect contrition or attrition arises from the consideration of the foulness of sin or from fear of Hell. Provided there be not present the will to sin with the hope of pardon this act is salutary as a motive in confession. That is to say, when we would amend ourselves and do what is right because it is pleasing to God, even though the stimulus to our weak will comes from fear, we are attrite. Such a condition of mind is radically different from one in which there is present a full intention of sinning, and the sole reason which prevents us is the fear of punishment. In the first Christ can recognise a fulfilment of his command, "If you love me keep my commandments"; in the second he must say, "I know you not," for he is judging rebels, who are also cowards.

About perfect contrition there is not such complete unanimity among spiritual writers, and the subject must have a chapter for itself.

CHAPTER VII

PERFECT CONTRITION

"Behold I have graven thee in my hands."—*Isaias* xlix 16.

FOR perfect contrition we are taught that our motive must be the pure love of God. Now it might seem that it would be easy to explain what the pure love of God means. In love there are degrees, and we can measure the perfection of the love by the unselfishness to be found in the motive. Nevertheless, there is an ambiguity in the word self. Spiritual writers bid us fight against self, die to it, and all recognise that the purest love is shown in self-sacrifice, in the virtue of a martyr. At the same time we know from the Gospel that we must love our neighbours as ourselves, and that cannot mean hating them or sacrificing them. We are furthermore bound to a certain self-respect, to put our salvation before that of our neighbour. In other words, there is a wrong and a right regard of self. Undoubtedly so apt are we to regard ourselves wrongly that human experience has given a bad sense more often than not to the word self. Selfishness is the

root vice, and all the other vices grow from it —vanity, pride, injustice and uncharity. In practice we ought not to pay attention to ourselves overmuch, for it is bad to consult the mirror instead of the world of nature, persons and God. The problem, however, remains. What is the correct attitude to the self, and how far should it and can it be forgotten in love? There are those who say that the motive should definitely exclude any reference to self. The love of God must be disinterested; it looks to his goodness and beauty and prays in pure admiration of his wondrous being. There is no thought of gain present, there is not even gratitude for favours received, for the love of God in our regard, for the Passion endured for me. The dear love of Christ on the Cross is worshipped because it shows forth the perfection of the divine nature. Certainly no Catholic fails to remember the fact that God's love does profit souls; and when holy persons have declared that they would willingly suffer in Hell for all eternity were it possible thereby to give greater honour to God, they must be taken as speaking with loving exaggeration. The Church does not approve of such language and has condemned it when seriously intended.

The complete separation of self-perfection,

of beatitude from the love of God, then, is not allowed, and for a very obvious reason. It is not true. One cannot love properly unless one understands the object of one's love, and God is and must be our felicity. And we do not honour him when we deprive him of this attribute. But while this is so, the upholders of the theory of pure love above mentioned maintain that in fact we should endeavour to think of God wholly for himself and bid adieu for the moment to our own selves. Their way of stating this has been called the ecstatic theory of love, and the marks of it, so it is claimed, can be found in many of the saints and wherever the language of love is poignant and sacrificial. Its disciples describe love as dolorous, as excruciating, as a rending; they stamp out the last vestiges of self, till in the dark death-chamber of that self the supernatural begins to shine. No doubt all mystics pass through some such phase, but the signs of the ecstatic theory are to be found where the violence is thought to reveal the very essence of true love.

Certain consequences are bound up with this interpretation of love. Since pure love is reserved for that degree of it which shuns all reference to self and is devoted to God in his own nature, the virtue of perfect charity will be

exercised only when this kind of love is present. The delight which accompanies the thought of God's goodness to us will belong, then, not to charity but to hope. The theologians would call it the love of concupiscence, but both Scotus and Suarez and others relegate it to the second of the theological virtues and attach the confidence in God's promises to us as a condition. This conclusion is at first sight surprising and makes an act of perfect contrition far more difficult than is sometimes supposed.

If this doctrine sound hard let us remember that there is a second view, the one adopted by St Thomas Aquinas. He does not stress this sharp division between the love of God and love of self. There is a right as well as a wrong love of self, as already pointed out. In fact, and in truth, the love of God is our supreme happiness, and it is doing an injustice to the very nature of true love to suppose that it can spell loss and not gain to the lover. There is nothing higher and nobler than love, and, paradoxically, the more one loves unselfishly the more does one find happiness and perfection. The end of love is not self-sacrifice but union. Here in this word "union," which is charged with significance, is the clue to the solution of St Thomas. The whole is greater than the part,

but if that part be a true member of the whole, then if the whole be served the part too profits. A member of a family should love his family and in his disinterested love he benefits himself. A member of a state should put the interests of the state above himself in his private civil capacity, and in so doing he will not lose. The same law governs the relations of individual human beings to the welfare of humanity, still more does it rule the relations of lovers, and of lovers who seek the intimacy of God. I can be selfish, and then I love myself not as a part or member or spouse but in isolation. I become a mercenary, ambitious for myself, making the divine love serve my interest or pleasure or devotion. This is wrong love and gives rise to a false opposition. But in the true love I am heart and soul his, and being his I find my bliss in union. That is to say, beatitude and loving worship coincide, for how could he who is consummate goodness and so desirable not be my good also ?

In this view of St Thomas charity is the act whereby man unites himself by God's aid to God, his supernatural end. It includes God and self in a supreme union, so that there is no need to make the sharp division between God as good in himself, and God as good to me.

My love of Christ crucified, then, if this be the right version of charity, is perfect love, and the soul which sees in the wounded hands and feet the loving generosity of Christ in its regard is stirred by pure love. " He loved me and gave himself for me "; and we need not seek further for an example of charity than this cry of St Paul, or the passion of a Magdalen at the feet of her Saviour.

NOTE.—If there are some who are worried at the thought that they are unable to realise the doctrine and efficacy of supernatural charity in their lives, it will be well for them to remember the following. First, it is a gift higher than sense. Secondly, even when we are not conscious of it, our good thoughts and acts are divinely graced and spread " the sweet perfume " of Christ throughout the world. Thirdly, if our intentions are consciously referred to our Lord, their worth thereby is still more increased. Better still, if we practise the presence of God, attend at Mass and go to Communion.

CHAPTER VIII

LOVE OF ONE'S NEIGHBOUR

"If we love one another, God abideth in us and his charity is perfected in us."—1 *John* iv 12.

"He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of my eye."—*Zacharias* ii 8.

THE full meaning of this love must still be delayed, but it is easy to see that St Thomas's explanation of charity helps us to understand why we should love our neighbour as ourselves. In the Christian body of which Christ is the Head, we must love all the members. The law that union is the end of love demands this, and in the manner described by our Lord. We are all united in the Church, and in that union we profit, our neighbour profits, and Christ gives himself to us in return for our self-sacrifice. We are far here from any harsh fakir doctrine of pain or pagan conception of self-annihilation. Suffering there must be and self-denial, but it is a love which brings a deeper peace and concord.

Now just as there are degrees in contrition, so too in the love of our neighbour we may fall short of perfect charity and yet not break the law. For instance. the love of our enemies is a

precept, but we are not bound to treat them as tenderly as those dearest to us. It is forbidden to wish them ill, when, that is, the wish passes from an uncontrollable feeling to a definite intention, and that means forgiveness of them, if they have done us an injury. But there is no strict obligation to do more than observe towards them the common marks of courtesy and to do for them more than we would do for any human creature. Were this necessity great, then indeed an extra effort would be needed. But in general it may be laid down that our charity must be well-ordered. That is to say, natural ties come first, and our charity should be proportioned to the duties imposed upon us by our state, our responsibilities and obligations. Throughout, however, it is incumbent on us to try and elevate ourselves to imitate the love of Christ, to foment goodwill among our neighbours, between parties in a state and between country and country. Unfortunately, there has been justification for the gibe, "See how these Christians love one another," and it has been said that Catholics are not always as alive as they should be to the needs of society. St Francis Xavier struck his breast in chagrin and shame that traders should vie with him in daring, when their motives were so mean compared to the

constraining love of Christ which urged him on. What are we to think too, when we behold the activities of secret societies, of pernicious sects and bodies who swarm over this world to find proselytes, while Catholics, with the truth as their motto and the strong urgings of grace, remain at home gossiping, scamping their work and unconcerned with the world-wide interests of Christ? The test of love is in deeds, and some Catholics would do well to examine their conscience and test the strength of their faith and charity by asking themselves how far they support and sympathise with the many societies which minister to the sick, the poor, the neglected, or set about restoring the peace of Christian homes, nations or international life.

CHAPTER IX

OF THE IMITATION OF CHRIST

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"—*Romans* viii 35.

"As the apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons."—*Canticle* ii 3.

WE are told by our Lord himself that we should imitate him, and he has always been the model or pattern on which Christians have tried to form their lives. Every action of his has been studied with loving care, every word treasured, every precept followed, and there is a countless host now rejoicing with him who have shown forth to the world his likeness in various places and at various times. Saint is said to differ from saint as star from star, and who would deny that Agnes and Augustine, Catherine and Francis, Philip, Ignatius and Teresa were different, and yet they are all alike as so many reflexions of the individual beauty of the God-man.

Innumerable books, again, have been written on his virtues, and the laws and maxims of the spiritual life to be found in every ascetical

treatise are drawn from the Gospels; and nevertheless his life remains unexhausted and ever fresh. "We may believe," says St Bernard, "that it was to attract this love, the love of the heart for the humanity of Christ Jesus, that our Lord who was invisible became Man and as Man dwelt on earth to make carnal man to love him carnally." Certainly no man has ever excited the love of mankind as Jesus Christ has done. In his own lifetime he drew to himself the crowds; and they who were attracted first by curiosity and wonder came to reverence him so deeply that the Pharisees feared to make a move against him. Mothers and young girls followed him from a distance ministering, cripples and beggars struggled to meet him in the road, the young men left their trades, the cultured like Nicodemus stole out at night to ease their mind in his presence, soldiers and centurions responded to his authority, and practical men of business rejoiced that he should refresh himself at their board. There is no portrait that can do justice to the royalty and simplicity of his ways. Call him gentle and you speak truth, but he is gentle as no other is gentle. Call him strong, and the waters stilled at his word, the evil spirits forced out of their victims, the soldiers and retainers on their

knees in Gethsemani re-echo the word, but his strength is ever in repose and the bruised reed is never broken. He is human in his disappointments and God-like in his forgiveness. He is wise and simple, candid and profound, indifferent to applause but glad of a return. He scorns parade, rhetoric, riches, adulation; he shows wrath at insincerity, charlatanism, and pride; but he is regal and meek and quick to understand and appreciate the good hidden or mingled with weakness. Though his enemies were ever on the watch to find fault they could do no better than trump up accusations when he was their prisoner, and their insults and rage could find no flaw in his integrity. He alone among the saints of history has never lamented his own sinfulness, and it has been left for those who knew him not to imagine faults when his contemporaries, even the most adverse, could discern none.

To understand our Lord we must put aside our own imperfect ideals, because according to our own desire do we fashion our heroes. He is greater than such ideals. He is no romantic, no poet, no socialist or philanthropist, no dreamer of a fierce reform. He escapes such categories. Hardly ever can the word lover be applied to him without the danger of a false

tenderness and sentimentalism creeping in to blur the outlines of the Gospels. Never shall we know him as he was and is, if we do not forsake our puny conceptions and sit at his feet like Mary of Bethany or follow him as the disciples followed him after he had said to them: "Come and see." To those with a simple unprejudiced eye even the first impression of his life story must be of one who is human, but more than human, and if this impression be followed up by prayer and obedience to his commands, then the majesty of the Son of God will appear and he will be to us the Way, the Truth and the Life.

It is essential, therefore, for those who would profit by the Gospel of Christ to meditate upon the Gospels by reading them and re-enacting them in their own lives. The most perfect way of doing this is to relive the culminating drama of his life in the Mass and in the whole liturgy of the Church. There we see the procession of the years and the undying act of the God-man, foretold in the Psalms, symbolised in the Old Testament, illustrated by inspired texts and realised in the ritual of the breaking of Bread. Subsidiary to this are private prayer and meditation, and in order that thought be mated with act we should carry the living

memory of Christ, which is a presence, throughout the daily routine of life. Then the roads and pathways and fields and hills of Galilee, and the streets of Jerusalem will not be far off, the murmurs of the crowds, the faces of children, the colour of soldiers' tunics, the devotion of women, fishermen, and sailors and state-officials and rich young men, and the sick, the sorrowful and the outcasts will move out of the past in which they are chronicled into our present experience.

Now of all the incidents of our Lord's life, it is the Passion which draws the Church most. We can learn without end from the scenes at Cana, or in the Temple or on the lake or at Bethany. Christ at the marriage feast, with Zacchæus or Martha and Mary, or in the storm, or in the midst of the traffickers, or again by the well in Samaria or on the mountains in prayer—all these stories and many more have brought countless souls nearer to the Kingdom which is himself; but our faint imaginations must have some one significant picture on which they can feast to the heart's content, and this picture is given to us either in the Last Supper or the Passion.

These two scenes are intimately connected, and in both our Lord reveals himself, his

character, his message, and his consuming charity. All spiritual writers tell us to gaze upon the Crucifix or listen to the voice of Christ speaking on the eve of his Passion. He reveals himself then as never before, for parting and sorrow open the heart and loosen the tongue. His message is contained in the symbolism of the acts and the mystery of the Cross, and as for love, " having loved his own he loved them to the end, most perfectly." He shows the Way—the way of self-abnegation, of sacrifice. They called him Master and yet he ministered to them and the servant was not to be greater than his Master. He was to leave them, but not as orphans, for he would come again and abide in them. A little while and they would see him no longer, but they were to love one another and keep his commandments. And finally they were to do as a memorial of him what he was doing there before them, breaking bread and transforming it into his own Body and offering it up in sacrifice. He was teaching them Truth—the truth of his redemption, of sin and grace, of his universal love, their unity in him as branches of a Vine, as one fold with one Shepherd, of the guidance of the Holy Spirit which would teach them all truth, of faith and obedience, of the office of Peter who

would confirm his brethren. And finally he spoke of the mystery of his love and the object of all his desires and endeavours, nothing less than the elevation of his beloved into a union with him comparable with that subsisting between himself and his Father. "I in you and you in me that we may be perfected into One." "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you, that the love wherewith the Father hath loved me may be in you and I in you."

Such is the mystery of Christ our Lord, and all our life and the life of the Church revolve round his charity.

CHAPTER X

THE CHARITY OF CHRIST

"We being many are one bread, one body, all that partake of one bread."—1 *Corinthians* x 17.

WHAT St John said of our Lord might be applied to his charity—that is, not all the books in the world could suffice to tell of it. But since this book is already becoming too long, I must leave out many attractive points and close with two which illustrate succinctly its nature.

The first belongs to the interior life of the soul working through grace to union with Christ. Human love has as its end union with the beloved. So, too, with the love of divine charity, but this latter has rules of its own. Here there is no marriage of equals, but of the highest with what is nothing in comparison. "God became man that man might become God," and the identification is through Jesus Christ, the God-man. He is one of us through his flesh being born of Mary, but he has, too, the nature of God. Therefore if we become flesh of his flesh and one spirit with him, we

participate to that degree in the God-head, and this union to which there is no parallel is likened by our Lord to a Vine and its branches, and by St Paul to the membership of a body. The synonym for this union is charity, for charity describes the consummation, the act of loving and the nature of that loving. As opposed to human love it is through and through divine, and that is why that love is a gift, is supernatural, is the beginning and the end of the union. Man does nothing save co-operate instrumentally. He removes obstacles, and his goodwill is caught up and invigorated by the activity of grace, which as actual grace initiates, helps and completes the natural act, and as sanctifying grace gives a new and divine quality to all man's operations. Briefly, we may say, he who is in grace acts "in virtute Christi"; he is not alone, he is in one sense not himself, while in another sense he is more himself because the elevation into Christ does not subtract from the dignity of human nature, but adds to it. Love does not despoil but enrich: rapture is no rape, and in the divine union the soul finds itself a thousand times more richly endowed.

But there are laws which govern this new relationship set up, and these laws do not only

convince us of its truth, but give us a fresh understanding of it. And what is more, we can see these same laws or principles at work in the Catholic statement of dogma, its theology, its discipline, and in the sanctification of souls. To take the latter as the chief example for the moment. Charity and perfection are synonymous in Catholic doctrine, and that charity means union with Christ of such a sort that the self becomes one with him without absorption. It is worth noting that the higher the nature the less does union imply absorption. It is indeed a false difficulty to suggest that union implies extinction. Just as love exalts both parties in human lives, so, too, the love of Charity gives and cannot take away. Now though there is no absorption, there is a process of elevation, and what we may call transformation, and it is here that the ascetical life finds its place. Complete docility is demanded, and within that docility vigorous effort. There is pain and apparent loss as the soul mounts and has to discard what is familiar and congenial to its exclusively human desires. The pale light of faith takes the place of the warmth of experience; the soul has to suffer the onslaught of the divine love without knowing its ways, as though God were like a surgeon operating upon

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it. It has to distrust emotions, suggested short cuts to perfection. It has to follow the laws of God and keep its attention on the dogmas of the faith, for these are the stations to its terminus, the supernatural life in God. God's hand is in the turns and twists of fortune, and God is working beneath our sensibility in the Sacraments. Not that we are left quite alone shivering in the dark. Our very faith brings with it a certainty and promotes desire, which is the beginning of charity. Faith is not, indeed, experience, but it is the substance of things hoped for and an argument for the unseen. That is to say, it is a possession. Christ and the Kingdom of God are within us, and the more we rid ourselves of the shadows and images which obscure his presence, the more shall we come to appreciate our Guest. To some, indeed, it has been the absence of faith which has been the precursor to a most happy realisation of Christ as alive, protective and present with them. Life has appeared as an experience terrifying in its loneliness, because no human friend can slake the soul's drought or draw within its solitary kingdom. To hear the footfall of Another there, to catch his voice, to feel the presence of a Love which is no illusion but closer than hands and feet, has been to enter

upon a new life in which the old things have passed away. And the same has happened to others bound down under a sense of guilt and weakness which they could not throw off. They have known what it is to be born again, not of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of the power of God.

Experience and realisation in faith therefore differ. For all, its strength can be increased by practice. At first God is as a rule very gentle. He allows us to appreciate sensibly the work of serving him. The sweets of religion are provided to entice us still further, and the Church never forgets the value of the external and of the emotional. The liturgical services are full of beauty and appeal to every sense; the saints are seen in image to encourage, and the Sacred Heart is a symbol which all can understand and love. But this sensible devotion is but a beginning, and the more arduous remains. Strengthened internally by grace, and with our faith enlivened by prayer and meditation on the life of Christ, we have to pass to that cold territory where we are left without the old resources. Consolations are taken away, and Providence seems to act awry; we are left with nothing but a naked will and have to whisper, " The Lord has given and the Lord has taken away, blessed

be the name of the Lord." Wholesome yet dangerous is this period, and its length is indefinite. We are tempted to look for a compromise or hark back to the flesh-pots of Egypt. The midday devil argues for a prudence or discretion which is comfort, for a service which is divided, and many there are who, invited to a complete self-surrender, have held back and remained decent mediocrities, and so lost the golden opportunity of union. For them Purgatory will accomplish, no doubt, what they might have won by merit, for the dark night of transformation and Purgatory seem so alike that they may, as many spiritual writers have declared, be one and the same stage in that process, which is required in supernatural charity. To become divine through the love of Christ some such purgation is necessary, in which the last traces of self-centredness disappear, and we become living individual functions of the Body of Christ, facets of his beauty, receptacles of his love and holiness.

In the spiritual life we have, then, the law, as it is called, of detachment, detachment from all the purely natural in order that all may be christened with the sacred Name. The first condition of this is the following of the ten commandments; the most perfect form is by

the three vows of religion: poverty, the surrender of material goods; chastity, the surrender of marital rights; and obedience, the surrender of the will. Another fact to be observed is that this supernatural charity generally proceeds in a way the reverse of natural love. The latter begins in experience, when the lover catches sight of his Beatrice. The first raptures are succeeded, please God, by a tranquil affection. The supernatural has its external evidence, which all should see, but it is not first and foremost a felt experience. We can never have a natural and absolute certainty of grace. We begin this life as infants in the womb, or, more correctly, the life of Christ within us precedes experience of it. But this knowledge of faith is confirmed by fidelity to the commands of Christ. A holy observance and discipline bring gradually a knowledge which, though still of faith, is more intimate and informed by charity. "Seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you." But the discovery is of one already there, and the door is the door of our own soul. Our Lover is no stranger. Like the Sleeping Beauty of the fairy tale, he has been surrounded with thorn bushes and hidden. It is our fidelity which has removed the brambles of our own inordinate affections

and disclosed our better and supernatural part.

This supernatural life depicted in the individual ought to be rounded off with a final word about the Church. The relationship of Christ with the Church is one of charity, and it is here above all that the mystery of love shines out. There are those who declare that they are unable to see anything unique in the Catholic religion. They find similarities in other religions, in the mystery cults, in sacraments, in the pictures of the after-life, in the longing for union with God by men, and in the philosophy of this union such as is to be found in, for example, the Buddhist or Hindu doctrines. Their mistake lies in comparing vague outlines. All women look alike in the distance, and the further off objects are the more general they become, and in their abstraction it is tempting to regard them as identical. If, for instance, we say merely that many religions had at one time or another a Trinity of Gods, the Christian religion seems to fall into place with the rest; but the wise man will notice that the Christian Trinity is not the outcome of human desire, nor does it consist of three Gods, but of one God, who, despite human conceptions, reveals himself as three persons in one nature. It is

the content which gives the glory to the Christian doctrine. Other religions, too, had festivals to a God who dies and is restored to life, but it should be noticed that the thought behind is always vague, the mystery itself is crude and pictorial, and it is always a very human myth. How different is Christ! He is a historical man known to us as Cæsar and Socrates are known, and yet is a claimant to divinity. And when we come to the Passion and its meaning, we pass beyond all human conceiving, and our desires fly away before this astounding revelation. Lastly, it is a complete delusion to put on a level the Christian and any other philosophy. Of course, all speak of union between God and man, but whereas the pagan has to take refuge in metaphors or contradictions, the Christian answer solves the problem, and in a way human ingenuity could never have divined.

In decrying vague outlines, which suggest parallels, I must not be thought to be denying the value of a first and vivid impression. Many at one glance, so to speak, can be held by the unique grandeur of the Catholic Church, the city set on a hill. "Vera incessu patuit dea." This impression is a valid one, and can be compared with the instantaneous impression made by a great poem or picture or cathedral; but,

unfortunately, men's minds grow so confused with false associations, with difficulties and prejudices, that often enough they cannot focus aright. They miss the unified splendour, and fix on details; they are distracted from the whole, and the authentic evidence of God is nothing to them but a tower of Babel. Their only cure is to purify their mind to learn discernment. The fatal policy is to lump together in a superficial way what are really diverse. And so common is this fallacy that a caution against it must be repeated many times. To a superficial onlooker there may not seem much difference between a clever schoolboy's game of chess and that of a Capablanca. An ancient manuscript may show a guess, like, at first reading, to the theory of an Isaac Newton. Shakespeare borrowed his plots freely, but the plays stand out in lonely perfection; and, if still another instance be needed, many a child can hum or finger out on a piano the themes of a Bach or Beethoven, but the glorious tower of music which they built out of these simple themes is their own secret.

Now the Christian revelation is like a piece of rich music in which the theme is taken up by violin and flute and every instrument in the orchestra and yet is never lost. Each part

adds to its significance, and each part rises and falls in with the rest to the praise and honour of Christ's charity. Start where you will in the story, and you will find yourself carried along to the same conclusion. A man may be struck by the holiness of some of his Catholic friends or by the long list of Catholic saints. He may be disposed to think of them as just morally better than others. But if he inquire further he will discover his mistake. There is a strange quality in that holiness, and those possessed of it, despite their differences, are singularly alike. They have a secret. "I have a secret, O Valerian," said St Cecilia, which Valerian could not know till Urban, the Pope, baptised him. Felicitas, awaiting her martyrdom, brought forth a child in pain. The gaoler taunted her, saying: "If now thou bearest pain so ill, what wilt thou do when faced by the wild beasts?" To whom she made answer: "Now it is I who suffer, but there Another will be in me, who will suffer for me, because I too am about to suffer for him." Is there not in this answer a family likeness to the cry of St Paul, "I live, not I, but Christ liveth in me"; and what is this likeness but the refrain of Christ's prayer at the Last Supper, "That the love wherewith thou (O Father) hast loved me, may be in them and

I in them"? Another variation on the same theme is self-denial. Already much has been written about it, but now once again track the idea back to its lair. An impartial observer will have noticed that self-denial is inherent in the Catholic life. He may, as is sometimes done, call it " repulsive and alien from modern ideas," or regard it as nothing more than a form of moral discipline. But this is not the ultimate explanation. For that we have to go back to charity, to the supernatural union which first purifies and then transforms the self into Christ. The self now ablaze with charity would bear the marks of the Crucified, " the cross to her she calls Christ to her, christens her wild-worst Best."

In both these instances, then, we have to turn to the secret of divine communion to explain their significance. It is divine communion too which provides the final explanation of the Church and of the Sacraments. The Church can be quoted as a great institution, as an organisation which is necessary because men cannot live save in social bonds and under authority. As such the majesty of the Catholic Church has impressed even a Macaulay. But once more we are looking only at the façade, and if we enter we see deep down the nave and choir

an altar, and on that altar is a living Presence. The Church does not exercise authority for moral reasons alone, nor, again, does it insist on external rites and observance for the sole reason that it is wise to aid the soul by means of the senses. The authority is identical with that of One who spoke with authority in Galilee. It is his voice, for he lives in the Church. It is his mystical Body and by this new Body he speaks at all places and at all times instead of being a far-off missionary in Palestine recorded in a book. As he was visible then, so is he visible now with limbs and voice. He who was the Word made flesh is still the Word and still flesh. "He that eateth me the same also shall live by me." Christians eat of the Holy Eucharist, "Christ's royal ration," which "dresses their days to a dexterous and starlight order." And what is the Church but the assembly round the table of the Lamb? The Bishop of Rome has "the presidency of the love-feast," where the food is divine life and Christ consummates his love.

Whatever phase, feature or law of the Catholic Church we take, it can be shown to express a certain divine charity. And it is good for us to meditate upon this and to work out the implications of some hitherto accepted and not

studied part of the Catholic faith. As in God's more lowly creation—the plumage, for example, of the peacock or bird of paradise—the colours set each other off and blend together, so in the revelation of a supernatural life in Christ there is nothing accidental or astray. Moreover, so surpassingly beautiful and unified is the plan that much of it will remain hidden unless we articulate the whole by a consideration of the parts, unless, that is, we follow the windings of charity through all the mysterious passages of God's dealings with men. How many miss, for instance, the intimate connection of the Eucharist with the Church, the mystical Body of Christ, a theme St Augustine loved to describe! The horror, again, always manifested by the Church against schism, which is the rending of the body of our Lord, will be better understood, if we know the kind of love Christ instituted at the Last Supper and on the cross. And to take other examples at random, there is the mystery of Christian fraternal love in which each is to treat his neighbour as Christ, for "what you do to the least of them is done to me"; there are too the Sacraments working, of their own power, if our dispositions be right, because the superior force of divine love can produce in us what is above mortal

meriting. And grace and merit and the Communion of Saints and the Motherhood of Mary, let us look at these privileges again in the context of Christ and his charity.

Let us not, then, dare to compare the superhuman Christian revelation with the makeshifts of natural religion and philosophy. It is our part to admire and accept, and not to criticise. We have to go to school to Christ, our Lord. We see him as God and man, bringing us good tidings of joy. During his lifetime he came to his own, and his own received him not. He was confined in swaddling clothes in the stable, and his youth was hidden away in Galilee. Even in his public life he was known to comparatively few compared with the teeming millions of the world. And yet his mission was universal and for all time. He would abide as a living presence in every heart, and his voice would be heard to the ends of the earth. How, then, did he triumph over the difficulties which his nature as man entailed? By Death and Resurrection, and the institution of the Eucharist and formation of his Church. Death ended the old dispensation, and in his risen Body he was a life-giver hampered no longer by time and space. Nay, more: this risen victimised Body was capable of increase and development.

"He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath everlasting life; and I will raise him up in the last day. . . . He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood abideth in me, and I in him." Here, then, is the principle of the new covenant. Here is the mode of the divine communion. By a union with his human nature we are made divine, and all those who participate at the altar, giving themselves in sacrifice and receiving him, become his members and constitute the Church. That Church received its name at Pentecost when those faithful to his promises were brought into more than a marriage union with the Spouse, to the music of the breath of the Holy Ghost and the pageantry of flames.

Where, then, now the Church is, there Christ is, and in the nuptial chamber of the Church souls pass into divine union and receive a new name. All the doctrine of the Church declares this, her discipline promotes it, and the Sacraments produce it. And the saints of God know the truth by experience. They are caught up into a higher love; they are slain mystically on Calvary, they wrestle with all that is natural that they may free themselves of it, and after the dark night of pure faith, when they have lost themselves and have not

yet found the Lover in their inmost heart, they enjoy what the mystics call divine espousals, and sing with Jacopone da Todi:

" Love, Love, my Jesu, O my heart's desire,
Love, Love, within thine arms to die were sweet.
Jesu, my Love, I climb the Bridal Pyre,
Love, Love, among the flames my Spouse to meet.
O Jesu, Lover, Husband, Tempest, Fire,
Take me, transform me in thine utmost heart
Visions around me fleet;
I swoon, I grope.
Jesu, my Heart, my Hope,
O shatter me in love."

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